

66 THE DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND OF  
1914

" The liability of having to defend the German and Austrian frontiers against Russia/<sup>5</sup> wrote Salisbury in an impressive Memorandum, " is heavier than that of having to defend the British Isles against France/" He saw no cause for alarm: with an unchallengeable navy England could look after her-self. Moreover no British Government could foretell the reaction of public opinion before the *casus belli* occurred.

Lansdowne, unlike his chief, was ready for a limited regional agreement with Germany, but this possibility was ruled out at Berlin. As Metternich, the new German Ambassador, remarked at the close of 1901, it was a case of "all or nothing."

The failure of the negotiations left no soreness behind, for neither party cared greatly for their success; yet from this time onwards the two Governments and peoples drifted ever further from one another. A sharp exchange between Chamberlain and Biilow on the conduct of British and German armies in the wars of 1870 and 1899 generated a good deal of heat. Naval co-operation in the winter of 1902-3 in Venezuela, who refused to pay her debts, was intensely unpopular in England. British participation in financing the Bagdad - Railway was approved by Balfour, the new Prime Minister, by Lansdowne, by the City, by the British Ambassadors in Constantinople and Berlin; but the plan was wrecked by unofficial Unionist opposition in Parliament and the press in the spring of 1903. So unpopular had Germany become even before the naval rivalry was acute that co-operation in anyform aroused angry antagonism.

In the history of British policy the years 1902 and 1903 stand out in bold relief. The conquest of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in 1902, following the conquest of the Sudan in 1898, marks the stage where the

sentiment of Imperial  
expansion reached saturation point. There  
was no craven  
fear of being great, to use Tennyson's famous  
phrase, but we  
had enough. The British Empire—the biggest in  
the world—  
merely desired to keep what it had taken  
centuries to get.  
Our battleships remained the first line of  
defence, yet diplo-  
macy might well assist. Germany had not yet  
become in any  
real sense an enemy, but she had ceased to be a  
friend. Since  
Salisbury's retirement in 1902 men were at the  
helm who felt  
the growing danger of isolation in an armed and  
threatening  
world. Fruitless though they were, the Anglo-  
German  
negotiations of 1901 revealed that more flexible  
minds were at  
work. The century of isolation had reached its  
close. The